

# LETTERS.

## SECRET SOPHISTRY

*New York City*

Having written for *The Nation* when Carey McWilliams was editor, I was until recently of the opinion that it was a rational journal open to new ideas. What changed my mind was the rather disturbed exercise in name-calling in which Aaron Latham (and Bob Woodward) indulged under the pretense of reviewing my book, *Secret Agenda* ["Mixed Nuts," Feb. 2]

Surely it must have been obvious to the editors that Latham's tirade was motivated by malice (and, I suspect, by sycophancy) rather than by a genuine interest in evaluating new evidence in the Watergate affair.

In his attack, Latham indiscriminately compares my book to books advocating conspiracy theories about the Kennedy assassination. The relevance of that comparison is obscure, however, unless he means to suggest that Watergate was *not* a conspiracy, in which case his revisionism is far more extensive than my own.

Further, when Latham implies that *Secret Agenda* is without documentation, he deliberately ignores upward of 1,000 footnotes, the testimony of more than a hundred sources and nearly 10,000 pages of formerly secret F.B.I. documents which even the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities was not permitted to see. The importance of that new information has been acknowledged by *The New York Times* and other publications; by pretending it does not exist, Latham does a disservice to *The Nation's* readers.

Elsewhere, Latham complains that James McCord's former employee Lou Russell is dead and so cannot confirm the story I have told. While it is true that Russell has passed on to his reward, he was hardly the only witness to the events I have described. For example, with respect to call girls at the Columbia Plaza Apartments and Democrats at the Watergate, liaison between the two was established not by Russell but by former Washington attorney Phillip Bailey, who is alive and kicking and quoted in my book.

Two things are most obvious in Latham's review: the hatred that he and Bob Woodward feel toward me and the sophistry on which they need to rely in their effort to condemn *Secret Agenda*. This is not entirely a surprise. Woodward is a careerist whose ambitions are hopelessly entangled in the accepted version of the Watergate affair. It seems to me that *Nation* readers should have been told that Woodward's remarks were less than unbiased; among other things, *Secret Agenda* embarrasses Woodward by citing errors in his reportage. This embarrassment is compounded by quotations from an internal C.I.A. memorandum in which one of Woodward's principal sources, Robert Bennett, himself an agent of the C.I.A., brags of "feeding" stories to Woodward in

an effort to steer him away from leads implicating the agency in the Watergate affair. The memo tells us that Woodward was "suitably grateful" for Bennett's help.

But what facts in my book do Woodward and Latham claim are incorrect? None. The only matter with which they appear to take factual issue concerns a statement about Woodward's Naval career. And it is here that the sophistry of these two becomes most apparent. According to Latham, "Hougan quotes a source who says Woodward 'was in Naval intelligence.'"

"But 'I wasn't in Naval intelligence,' Woodward says. 'It just isn't so.'"

The reader, then, is left to conclude that I have relied on an anonymous source to make Woodward's Naval career seem more intriguing than it was. In fact, however, nothing could be further from the truth: Woodward and Latham are being disingenuous. It is they, not I, who prefer that my source should remain anonymous. As *Secret Agenda* states, it was Roger Farquahar, the first newspaper editor to give Woodward a permanent job, who expressed the opinion that Woodward had been in Naval intelligence. Farquahar told me that he based this opinion on his recollection of Woodward's résumé and on Woodward's obvious access to intelligence information. Nowhere do I state that Woodward was in Naval intelligence. Rather, I make it clear that Woodward, in his capacity as a communications officer and, subsequently, as part of an elite briefing unit, was given access to intelligence information of the greatest sensitivity. Does Woodward deny that? Or does he, merely wish to obscure the fact by insisting, irrelevantly, that he was not attached to the Office of Naval Intelligence *per se*? My suspicion is that he would prefer to obscure the issue rather than to clarify it. But if his intention is to deny that he had extraordinary access to military secrets, he would do well first to discuss the matter with his former colleagues at the Pentagon—many of whom I interviewed.

*Jim Hougan*

## LATHAM REPLIES

*Washington*

This letter is a good example of how Jim Hougan's mind works. He sees conspiracies everywhere. He even believes a negative book review must be the work of conspirators. He says Bob Woodward and I conspired to get him. That conspiracy consisted of a single telephone call. I called up Woodward and asked him if the charges Hougan makes in his book are true. That isn't conspiracy, it's reporting. I had not intended to quote Woodward in the review, but I changed my mind when he compared Hougan's book to a "turd in the soup." I felt I could not pass up such colorful—or, rather, off-colorful—language, especially since I thought he had a point. In his letter

as in his book, Hougan insists on ascribing motives that are based on nothing but his vivid imagination. For instance, I don't hate Jim Hougan. I've never met him or even heard of him until now. But I did hate his silly book.

*Aaron Latham*

## SCOUNDREL TIME

*New York City*

With regard to Kai Bird and Max Holland's "Dispatches" of February 2, anyone who equates the sporadic efforts of a miserable and oppressed population to relieve the depredations of military occupation with a highly successful movement to terrorize Arabs into leaving their lands by murder, maiming and other acts of brutality (all abetted by a government bent on precisely the same goal) is a scoundrel. Even if fairness was behind the authors' bias, which it patently is not, you would expect the essential distinctions in scale and proportion to be observed. But no "P L O terrorism" is portrayed as the equal villain, in spite of facts, in spite of what even most Israelis have argued. How many more Palestinians must be massacred, tortured and deported before our brave columnists finally acknowledge the massive amount of U.S.-supported anti-Arab terrorism?

What is galling about Bird and Holland is that the rest of their item on Shin Bet terrorism makes the truth about Israeli state policy very clear. So why the pusillanimous introduction? Why, except for common cowardice, don't they stop hiding behind the ridiculous fiction of "P L O terrorism" on the West Bank?

*Edward W. Said*

## BIRD AND HOLLAND REPLY

*Washington*

Edward W. Said engages in divisive semantics. Both sides use the gun, but we never equated Palestinian terrorism, a tactic born of desperation and weakness, with that of the Israelis. If we had done so, we certainly would have noted that far more Palestinian lives have been lost. It is ahistorical for Said to assert that Palestinian terrorism is fictional, he piles absurdity on hyperbole by saying that most Israelis agree with his view.

Said knows that Palestinians will never achieve their right to self-determination through terrorism. It does not help push the Palestinian movement toward nonviolent struggle when someone like Said seemingly denies the fact and consequences of the gun.

What is truly galling is Said's fierce attack on us. Why would he impose ideological rigidity on one of the few U.S. magazines to depict the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a tragedy? Presumably, Said would have us write that which serves to dehumanize and ultimately delegitimize the Israelis.

If we are the enemy, Edward, who are your allies?

*Kai Bird and Max Holland*